

Managing and Supporting Career Breaks in the Sciences

Elizabeth Freeland

Washington University in St. Louis

October 22, Women in Astronomy 2009

Overview

Career Breaks

- What & Why
- Why should the scientific community care?
- Personal experience

Taking a break - Should you? How?

Supporting Career Breaks - individuals, institutions

What & Why

A career break is...
reduced or zero hours in a scientific job.

- outside any institutional structure, my experience
- within an institution

Possible reasons for a career break

- ❖ children
- ❖ dual-career couple

Possible reasons for a career break

- ❖ children
- ❖ dual-career couple
- ❖ elder or other family care
- ❖ alternative career path
- ❖ military service
- ❖ government scientific advisor

*This isn't just about women
having babies!*

Why should the
scientific
community care
about career
breaks?

- Work-family balance

“Pressures women face in balancing career and family (are) the most significant barrier identified by women scientist and engineers regardless of (field)”

from a survey of NSF POWRE awardees 1997-2000; Sue V. Rosser, The Science Glass Ceiling, pg 35 (2004)

Work-family balance is a major concern of grad students and a challenge for the majority of assistant professors.

K. Ward, L. Wolf-Wendel, *Academe* Nov/Dec, 2004.

J. A. Jacobs, S. E. Winslow, *Community, Work & Family*, 7, Aug. 2004.

- Dual-career couples

62% of female scientists and engineers are married to male scientists or engineers. (Rosser, pg 141) (68%F 17%M physics - APS)

- Segmentation of the work force

i.e. adjunct vs tenured

In academia, this tends to perpetuate gender imbalance.

Jerry A. Jacobs, *Sociological Forum*, **19** No.1 Feb. 2004.

- Cross-cultivation of science

New ideas from other branches of science are beneficial.

Science needs people active in policy advising and outreach.

- Diversity

Life is not one-size fits all. Accepting only scientist who have followed a “conventional” career path limits our fields.

My Experience

Why I “left”

- ❖ The break was unintentional.
- ❖ No one with career / family I wanted to emulate.
- ❖ **No mentor.** No one with positive answers.

My husband had a post-doc offer at Brookhaven and my grad school experience had left me with an interest in teaching at an undergrad institution.

--> It seemed reasonable that we could both move to NY and I could find a job there.

(geographically-limited job searches, pregnancy complications, child with health issues)

Life Outside

- ❖ Cut off from science
- ❖ Experienced other careers and work cultures
 - ❖ valued skills, job offers,
 - ❖ lives beyond work - it was o.k. to want to have kids
- ❖ A breath of fresh air, a positive experience
- ❖ A safety net

The Return

- ❖ We moved to Chicago, a physics-rich area.
- ❖ I decided to return to physics on my terms.
- ❖ Now what?
- ❖ What would you do? Where would you go?

See: *My Career Break* , E. Freeland, CSWP Gazette, Fall 2006

Successes (mostly)

- ❖ part-time teaching position
- ❖ summer research project with scientists at Fermilab
“I’ll find funding.” (How hard could that be?)
- ❖ AAUW American Fellowship (1yr + teaching)
- ❖ APS Blewett Scholarship (1yr+teaching)
- ❖ a couple years of no funding
- ❖ 1 year post-doc at Washington University (St. Louis)

Pitfalls

- ❖ part-time teaching position
 - not a re-entry route, can border on exploitation
- ❖ “I’ll find funding.” (How hard could that be?)
 - very difficult without “full-time institutional affiliation”
- ❖ one-year grants + teaching
 - Did I mention two small children and only one spouse?
- ❖ a couple years of no funding
 - work may not be valued (by others or yourself!)

Hard work pays off..

Hard work pays off...

Yes, but I also “got lucky”.

Scientists hate the idea of “luck” being involved.

Hard work pays off...

I had *opportunities*.

Opportunities

- ❖ Chicago is a science rich area.
- ❖ My adjunct teaching required one or two days per week and the salary was (relatively) good.
- ❖ AAUW American Fellowship existed.
- ❖ Hildred Blewett died the year I applied for the AAUW fellowship. The Blewett scholarship was created.
- ❖ St. Louis, Urbana, Indianapolis are not too far away.

How to take a break.
In three steps.

Suggestions and ideas are available as a pdf.

Managing and Supporting Career Breaks in the Sciences:

Taking a Break

WIA 2009

Elizabeth Freeland, papagena@earthlink.net
home.earthlink.net/~papagena go to "Career Breaks"

Think About it!

Goals

- What are your personal/career goals?
- When planning with a partner:
 - Discuss these goals with your partner.
 - Can you live cross-country? Cross-state? For how long? Is one of you willing to be under-employed?

Children

- Do you want children? If so how many? How flexible are you on this?
- How do you feel about parenting? What does it mean for YOU to be a good parent?
- Who will take care of your children and for how long? A nanny at 50+ hours a week or a daycare at 40. Other family? What are you comfortable with?

This can all change when the baby arrives! Most planning goes out the window when children are involved – BUT, the act of planning can make you aware of your options.

The Break

- Do you really need a break?
- Do you want a full non-working break or reduced working hours?
- If reduced, what is ideal, what could you live with. NOTE: most part-time workers put in more hours than planned.

Find a Mentor.

A more senior person may be willing to help and advise you. This may be in the form of career advice, scientific advice, or both. It can be very helpful to have a career mentor while on a break. They can offer perspective - the big picture. They can also provide energy and motivation when yours may be waning. This person need not be from your field of study.

Plan!

- As much as possible, think this through BEFORE you leave.
- Have you done or can you do a post-doc first?
- Does your current institution have a policy for breaks? Ask around.
- Can you have something lined up for your return whether this is 3 months or a year away.
- What resources do you have? Family? Finances? Universities or labs nearby? (They have libraries and seminars.)
- Save up money, or plan to use some income to "stay connected."
 - This could be for attending a seminar, keeping up with your field or meeting with a colleague.

- You will need free time (daycare?) for the job search upon your return.
- Consider working part-time. This can provide income and contacts. A teaching job may help you beef up that part of your resume.
- Negatives of part-time work
 - It takes up your time.
 - Some people will think you intend to stay in such a position permanently.
 - Working somewhere part-time does NOT mean you will eventually be offered a full-time position.
 - Perhaps you will want to remain part time. (This may not be a negative...)

Keep in Touch

- Plan to talk with your mentor on a regular basis - weekly meetings work well. This may be in person, by telephone, or email.
- Internet:
 - Keep in touch with colleagues.
 - Get journal articles from the web,
 - Check for streaming video of seminars, conferences, and colloquia.
- Remain a member of scientific societies. Often this allows you some journal access.
- Attend a conference or workshop; perhaps you can even present some (recent) past work. Keep an eye out for anything near your area to reduce costs. If you work part-time, your employer may be willing to pay the conference fees, or the organizers may subsidize the costs. Ask!
- Create your own support group. Find one or two other people in a similar situation and keep each other going. Other people can also give you creative ideas for your own situation.
- Getting back in --> Grants – See separate article.

Getting Back In

- Be creative.
- My website (see above) lists grants open to individuals with career breaks.
- Check back with grants of interest since wording changes.
- Talk with colleagues and your mentor. They may have new ideas.
- Consider volunteering (i.e. work without pay) to update your skills, make new contacts, garner letters of recommendation.
- Attend a career workshop if possible.
- Don't take no for an answer.
- If the people around you are negative - Find new people!

Step 0-a. Think about it.

What are *your* career goals? personal goals?

What resources do you have: family? financial?

If the break is for children:

What does it mean for *you* to be a good parent?

Etc.

Step 0-b. Find a mentor.

I've had three so far.

- ✧ Look outside your field.
- ✧ Ask someone you connected with at a workshop or lunch.
- ✧ mentornet.com
- ✧ program at your current institution

Discuss your options with them.

Step 1. Plan

Have you done or can you do a post-doc first?

Does your current institution allow breaks?

Do you want a complete break or reduced hours?

What are your resources?

Can you set up an avenue for return before you leave?

etc.

Talk with your mentor(s).

Think outside of the box!

“In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable”

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

This is inscribed on my ipod!

Step 2. Take the break

Keep in touch!

Talk with your mentor and colleagues.

Contact others who have done this. (e.g. Blewett)

Attend a conference or workshop in your area.

Use the internet.

Be creative!

Note: If you have small children, this is where childcare money comes in.

Step 3. Get back in

Get a mentor. (But you already have one right?)

Look for opportunities.

Don't assume you are not eligible or don't have the appropriate experience.

Don't take no for an answer.

There *are* people who want to help.

If the people around you are negative,
find new people.

A little about grants...

Grants - the bad news

Most grants require that you have “full-time institutional affiliation” - at the time of application!

-- exception AAUW, APS-Blewett

Junior scientist grants almost always have the wording “within 5 years of Ph.D.”

-- exception Sloan Foundation, AAUW

Grants - the good news

Some countries have re-entry grants.

(U.K., Switzerland, Japan, U.S.-Blewett)

There are new grants all the time.

Grant wording changes, for better and worse.

(photo)

high-energy physics conference,
Krakow, 2009

Babies at dinner?!! ☺

Grants - practical advice

Get help.

- Attend a career workshop; learn how to apply.
- Talk with others like you, a career mentor.

Get connected.

- Find a scientific mentor.
- Consider “volunteering”; be careful.

(Update skills. Make connections. Garner letters of recommendation.)

Keep tabs on grants.

- Wording changes, new ones appear.

Supporting Career Breaks

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

2006 Ford Motor Co., War Room

Suggestions and ideas are available as a pdf.

Coping with and Supporting Career Breaks in the Sciences:

Supporting Career Breaks

WIA 2009

Elizabeth Freeland, papagena@earthlink.net

Many of the websites mentioned here are on my website: home.earthlink.net/~papagena go to "Career Breaks".

How Individuals Can Help Support Career Breaks

Work - Family (personal life) Issues

- Talk about work-family issues. The subject should not be taboo, and students *are* thinking about it!
- *Show* students and junior scientists that balancing work and family is possible.
- Be careful not to see someone as a less "serious" scientist simply because they have concerns about their personal life.
- At student orientations, graduate and undergraduate, have scientists with families discuss their choice of a scientific career and how they balance it with family. (Yes, at least one department actually did this!)
- Students are looking for guidance and answers. If you do not give it to them they will create their own - I did.

Career Mentoring

- Understand that advisor \neq mentor. Help and encourage students, post-docs, and colleagues to find mentors.
- Be realistic but positive about breaks and non-traditional career paths.
- Remember, no one knows what can be accomplished until someone tries.

How Institutions Can Help Support Career Breaks

Disperse Information

Scientists do not know others who have succeeded, nor do they know *how* others succeeded.

- Communicate how career breaks are supported within your institution and within various scientific fields.
- Scientific societies should consider having a central repository for information relating to career breaks in that field. The UK's Institute of Physics has a career-break handbook!
- Make the career break path a known, legitimate path.
- Understand that lack of information and resources can lead to longer and often permanent breaks.

Flexible Career Paths (& Part Time Status)

"Alternative paths to success must be seen by the academic community as equally prestigious and attractive to faculty regardless of gender, age, race, or ethnicity."

(Sue V. Rosser, *The Science Glass Ceiling*, pg 144, 2004)

- Consider options for flexibility in the career path. For suggestions, see "An Agenda for Excellence: Creating Flexibility in Tenure-Track Faculty Careers" by the ACE, 2005.
- Make part-time legitimate in the culture of science. It's a logical way to return to a full-time career.
- Remove "full-time" status as a criteria for grant applications.
 - especially for short-term or summer grants
 - at least allow petitions for eligibility
- Do not look upon multiple post-docs or soft money positions as a bad omen. They may have allowed a talented person to juggle a complex personal life.
- Relax the time constraints on grants and programs targeting "junior" researchers; see the Sloan Foundation Fellowship.

Be Open-minded

- Evaluate the person based on their work, ability, and promise - not on how well they have stuck to the conventional path.
- People who "get back in" have most likely been creative, tenacious, and demonstrated good time management skills - these are desirable traits in a scientist!
- Work to make it easier to stay "in" or connected. Family/career does *not* have to be an all or nothing choice.

Family Friendly Culture

- Work to create a more family friendly culture.
- Show students and junior scientists that balancing work and family is possible.
- Be careful not to see someone as a less "serious" scientist simply because they have concerns about their personal life.

Final word to Institutions:

- Changes work best when they come from the top down (provosts, deans).
- Changes (and current opportunities) **MUST** be communicated to faculty.
- Both structural and cultural changes must occur, e.g. NSF ADVANCE grants.

B. Sullivan, C. Hollenshead, G. Smith; Developing and Implementing Work-Family Policies for Faculty, pg 24;

K. Ward, L. Wolf-Wendel; Fear Factor: How Safe Is It to Make Time for Family? pg 28;

K. Quinn, S. Lange, S. Olswang; Family Friendly Policies and the Research University, pg32;

Academe, Nov/Dec 2004.

What individuals can do

Talk about careers and family.

These should not be a taboo subjects. (Yes, they still are.)

Your students and colleagues *are* thinking about it.

UC Faculty Work and Family Survey 2003,
ucfamilyedge.berkeley.edu

Invite seminar speakers.

Post articles,

AAS Status, CSWP Gazette,

APS's Gender Equity" workshop report, 2007,

L'Oreal/Science "Beating the Odds: Remarkable Women in Science - 2008.

Start lunchtime discussions.

Attend and send students to career workshops...

What individuals can do

Be realistic but positive about career breaks and non-traditional career paths.

Encourage mentoring.

Help junior scientists find mentors (**mentor** \neq **advisor**!)

Offer to be a mentor. (See morning parallel session, Fri 23.)

Even grad students can be mentors!!!

Via phone or email can work!

The goal is to advance science,
not have people follow a specific
career path.

Be open-minded.

What institutions can do

- Work to make it easier to stay “in” or connected.
- Make part-time legitimate in the culture of science.
 - It’s a logical way to return to a full-time career.
- Remove “full-time, institutional affiliation” status as a criteria for grant applications. Requiring such status during the grant tenure is different.
 - *Yes you can do this.* At a minimum, make clear that petitions for eligibility are acceptable, especially for short-term or summer grants

What institutions can do

- Don't look upon multiple post-docs or soft money positions as a bad omen.
- Relax the time constraints on grants and programs targeting “junior” researchers.

The Sloan Foundation can do it; so can you.

Sloan Foundation:

Sloan Research Fellowships

“(Candidates) may be no more than six years from completion of the most recent Ph.D. ... unless special circumstances such as military service, a change of field, or child rearing are involved... If any of the above circumstances apply, the nomination letter should provide a clear explanation.”

Remember

- People who “get back in” have been creative, tenacious, and demonstrated good time managements skills.
- Evaluate people based on their work, ability and promise - not on how well they have stuck to the conventional path.
- Work-family issues are being discussed and confronted Solutions are being proposed and tested, career breaks among them.

“An agenda for Excellence, American Council on Education, 2005;
“Gender Equity” workshop report, APS, 2007.

Thanks to

John Freeland

Andreas Kronfeld

Maria Klawe

AAUW

Hildred Blewett

Cathrine Mavriplis

Debbie Harris

Rachelle Heller

A study from the NSF ADVANCE program at George Washington University



student.seas.gwu.edu/~forward/mindthegap/

- women who have completed their PhD or DSc,
- have been employed in an academic setting and
- were, or have been, in a career break for less than five years.

Please contact Dean Rachelle Heller at sheller@gwu.edu.

Fin